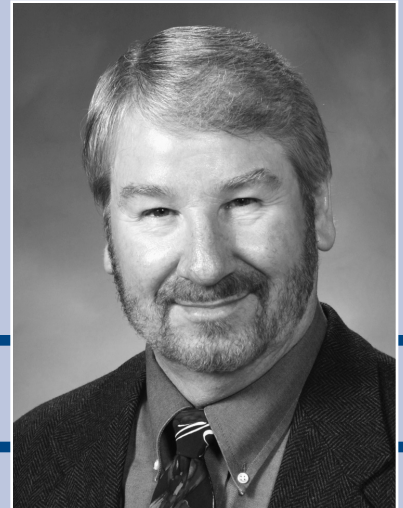


State Representative **Alex Wood**

Committees:

Commerce & Labor (*Vice Chair*)
Select Committee on Environmental Health
Transportation



State Representative
Alex Wood

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The Legislature at a Glance: 2008

Spring 2008

Dear friends and neighbors,

The 60th Washington State Legislature wrapped up its business in mid-March and I'd have to say that the 2007-08 biennial effort was a good one. We've got some important new laws on the books to make our families and homes and communities safer. We've tried to help our schools do a better job of giving Washington's students the knowledge and skills they'll need to succeed in life.

The Legislature set in motion some things that should make this a cleaner, more environmentally sound state within a few years, we made progress on our goal of making sure every child in the state has access to health care, and we did some things that were good for employees, good for businesses, and good for the economy as a whole.

**“... a balanced,
no-new-taxes
budget that
leaves \$850
million in
the bank.”**

And when we left Olympia on March 13, we'd finished work on a balanced, no-new-taxes budget that leaves about \$850 million in the bank, one of the largest reserves in state history.

As I say every year, there's not room in this short newsletter to talk about everything the Legislature did, and how that might affect you and yours, but I can make a start here. For more information, please contact me or my legislative assistant. I'd like to hear your comments, questions, criticisms and concerns.

As always, thanks for the privilege of serving as your state representative.

Sincerely,

Alex





The Legislature at a Glance: 2008

Environmental Health

As a member of the House Select Committee on Environmental Health, I've had the privilege of working on a number of issues with an eye toward making Washington not just a "greener" state, but a cleaner and healthier one as well. We passed bills this session to reduce greenhouse gases, increase the number of so-called green-economy jobs, provide healthy, Washington-grown foods for school lunches, limit the amounts of toxins in toys and other children's products, and protect kids from exposure to pesticides in their schools. One bill I sponsored that did not pass this session would have required manufacturers and wholesalers to label their lead-containing products to let consumers know just how much of this dangerous element they were buying. We made reasonable exemptions for obviously lead-containing products like ammunition and small fishing weights, to avoid imposing unreasonable rules on our businesses. My bill passed in the House with a large majority and was endorsed by the Senate Consumer Protection panel, but time ran out before the full Senate could approve it. Lead exposure in children and adults is extremely dangerous, and its effects cost Washington taxpayers more than a billion dollars a year. I'll reintroduce the bill next year and, because we'll have more time to work it through the process, I'm optimistic about its ultimate passage.



Made in Washington

If you've followed my legislative activities for a while, you know I'm a strong supporter of "Made in Washington" products. Whether we're talking about farm and forest products, airplanes, computer chips, software or almost anything else imaginable, those three words mean jobs for Washington people. Dollars for the Washington economy. Tax revenues to pay for vital public services. Stronger communities. More often than not, they also tell us we're getting a good product, and if it happens to be a product made here in Spokane . . . so much the better.

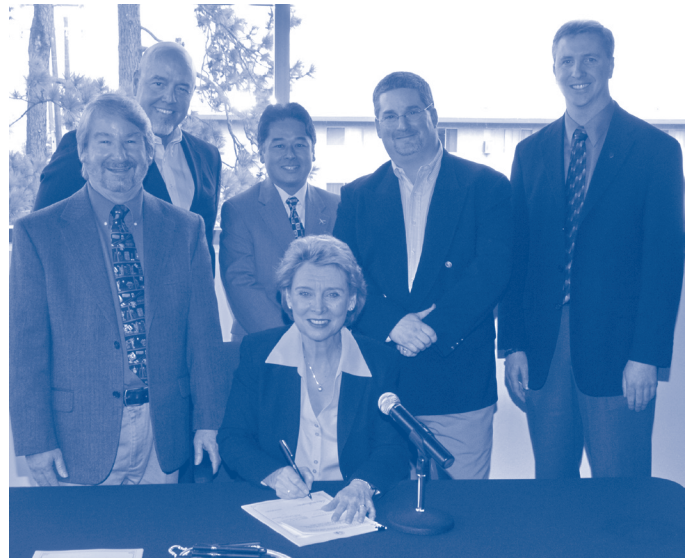
This year I introduced legislation designed to encourage the growth in Washington of a relatively new industry: craft distilling. If you haven't heard of craft distilling, you're not alone; as I said, it's a young industry (fewer than 100 nationwide) and brand new here in the Northwest. Think microbreweries. Think boutique wineries. Now translate that to small-scale manufacturers of distilled spirits and you've got craft distilling.

The Legislature recognized long ago that microbreweries and small winemaking operations were very different from the large companies, and out of fairness, established some different rules to govern them. A major brewery – one that produces more than 60,000 barrels of beer a year – pays \$6,000 to obtain a license from the state's Liquor Control Board. Microbreweries, on the other hand, pay \$100 for the same license. For winemakers the cut-off point is 250,000 liters a year. Above that, the license is \$400; below, it's \$100.

Until now, the Board made no size distinction for distillers. The license was \$2,000, period. To help level the playing field for craft distillers like Spokane's Dry Fly Distilling, my bill drops that fee to \$100 for companies that produce less than 20,000 gallons of spirits a year, with the added condition that at least 50 percent of the raw materials that go into their production must be grown in Washington. To further bring them into line with small-scale beer and wine producers, the new law allows craft distillers to sell small amounts of spirits directly to the public, and to set up tasting rooms where they can give away very small samples of their products – no more than a half-ounce per sample, and no more than two ounces to a person in a single day.

As a final note, I want to tip my hat to Sen. Chris Marr from Spokane's 6th district. He introduced a companion bill this year in the Senate to accomplish the same goal as my craft distillery House bill, and it was a pleasure to work in tandem with him to make sure our policy goal was reached.

Gov. Gregoire signed my craft distillery bill (HB 2959) into law March 20 in Spokane. Joining us for the signing were Sen. Chris Marr (center) and Dry Fly Distillery's Kent Fleischman, Don Poffenroth and Arlen Harris.



Representative Alex Wood • 3rd District



Prescription Benefits for the Uninsured

Every Washington state resident who does not have prescription drug coverage or whose prescription insurance is inadequate can enjoy significant savings on medicines purchased at hundreds of Washington pharmacies – including 20 here in Spokane—thanks to the legislatively-created Washington Prescription Drug Program. There is no income test for enrollment, and you can save as much as 60 percent on generics and 20 percent on name-brand drugs. To locate participating pharmacies, and to enroll and receive your free program membership card, visit www.rx.wa.gov or call 1-800-913-4146.



Helping Families Own and Keep a Home



Washington hasn't been hit quite so hard as many states by the national subprime-mortgage meltdown, but that doesn't mean we haven't been touched. Foreclosures, among the most devastating experiences that families can face, are happening to our friends and neighbors here in Spokane. The Legislature hasn't single-handedly solved the problem, but this session did produce a significant group of housing-

finance laws, ranging from counseling services for borrowers to limits on pre-payment penalties, regulations for mortgage brokers, and assistance for families at risk of foreclosure.

Civil Rights

It took decades of conflict (and that's putting it lightly) for the Legislature to finally outlaw discrimination based on a person's sexual orientation. That was quite a milestone. Then last year, after more years of uphill battling, a majority of legislators at last voted in favor of setting up a domestic-partnership registry. The halls of the Capitol didn't run with blood, but it was still a hard-fought victory.

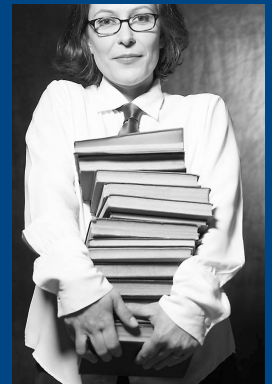
So it may come as a surprise that this year we passed with very little opposition a new law that added several dozen common-sense rights and responsibilities to the domestic-partnership law. These additions apply to same-sex couples and to domestic partnerships formed by older men and women who aren't married but who are in a committed relationship with one another. Among the areas addressed by the new bill are nursing-home visitation, benefits for veterans, community property, probate and trust, and guardianship and power of attorney.

Sometimes laws help shape our culture and society, and sometimes the law itself is the thing being shaped. It took years for mainstream society to accept the idea that the American ideal of "justice for all" really meant "for all." Landmark civil rights laws, from women's suffrage to *Brown v. Board of Education* to the Voting Rights Act and beyond, helped do the shaping. It seems that in the case of last year's domestic-partnership law and this year's relatively painless expansion of rights for gay and lesbian couples, the Legislature took its cue from an increasingly tolerant populace and acted accordingly.

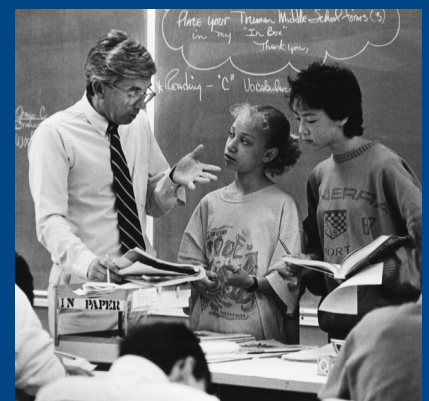


Education

Overall, this was a good session for education in Washington. And because the state constitution calls providing for basic education the paramount duty of the Legislature, that's one way to judge the quality of the legislative session as a whole. The Legislature allocated more than five million additional state dollars to Spokane County school districts in this year's supplemental operating budget, with nearly half of that going to the Spokane School District alone. A good portion of that new money will go to teachers and staff as salary and cost-of-living increases called for in Initiative 732. We also secured funding to improve school libraries, enhance student learning opportunities and reduce class sizes. Statewide, the Legislature acted this year



to improve the Washington Head Start program, expand career and technical education options, revise an inadequate math curriculum, and make it easier for college students to transfer the credits they've earned when changing schools.





The Legislature at a Glance: 2008

Increased Population + Increased Responsibilities = Increased Spending

If you pay much attention to the news – or to the political ads we're going to be swamped with for the next several months – you'll hear a whole lot of talk about the state budget. It's gone up this much. It's gone up that much. It's too much. It's not enough. Much of the time, especially if percentages are involved, you'll hear figures tossed out that seem to contradict one another. It's enough to make you wonder just what to believe. Sometimes you'll hear things that make you think government spending is somehow out of touch with reality, that's it's going up for no particular reason at all. And that's exactly what some people want you to think.

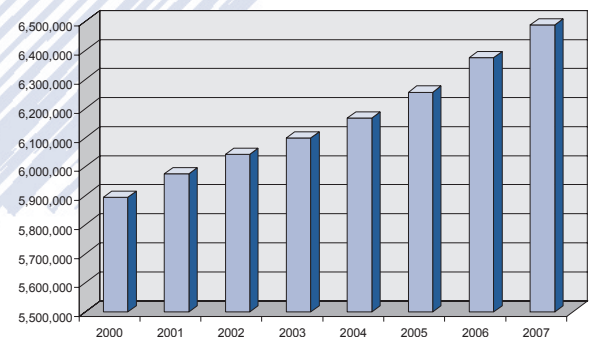
I'm not going to try to convince you what to think; that's up to you, not to me, or an ad agency, or a spin doctor. What I will do, though, is offer a few cold, hard facts about some things that definitely do have an influence on state budgets.

- The population of school-age kids in the state has been rising steadily since 1984.
- The number of elderly Washington residents receiving state assistance for nursing-home or home care has grown by almost half in the last decade.
- The overall medical-assistance caseload has more than doubled since 1990.
- The population of our state prisons was 7,446 in June 1970; last June the figure was 18,483.
- Our state population, as this chart illustrates, has grown by nearly three-quarters of a million people just since 2000.

And there's one more very important thing that the chart can't show you: During the state's post-9/11 recession, we had to cut about \$2.5 billion in spending on a number of public services. We've done our best since then to restore many of those cuts, while remaining frugal and increasing our rainy day reserve to avoid having to make those kinds of severe cuts in the future.



Washington's population boom



I hope you've found this information to be helpful. The 2009 session promises to be a busy one, with many major issues coming before the Legislature. I'll keep you posted and, until then, thanks for taking the time to be involved with your state government.

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The Legislature at a Glance: 2008

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State Representative

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